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Classified By: Political Counselor Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Sevastopol continues to be in the middle of a tug-of-war between Ukraine and Russian for the hearts and minds of its residents. Moscow Mayor Luzhkov visited Sevastopol February 21, to open a renovated Moscow-funded Russian Culture and Information Center, to visit the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Moskva missile cruiser, and to take part in other ceremonial events. While there, he referred to Sevastopol as the "city of Russian glory" and made inflammatory remarks suggesting that the Crimean peninsula was still an integral part of Russia. Sevastopol still struggles with its Ukrainian identity, and its ethnic Ukrainian minority, 22 percent of Sevastopol's population, feels insecure about its freedom to speak Ukrainian. Although virtually all Sevastopol schools provide instruction primarily in the Russian language, with Ukrainian studied as a foreign language, most Sevastopol residents do understand and support the importance of Ukrainian language fluency for their children's future. The Sevastopol city administration is poorly prepared to cope with a future without the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which directly provides 18 percent of the city budget and employs 23,000 Sevastopol residents (or 12.7 percent of the employed population), but Sevastopol Mayor Kunitsyn and other Sevastopol residents are skeptical that the Russian fleet will actually leave in 2017, when the current Russian-Ukrainian agreement is scheduled to expire. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) We visited Sevastopol and Simferopol to gauge local attitudes toward the Russian Black Sea Fleet and its possible departure in 2017, relations between the ethnic Ukrainian and Russian communities, and regional political issues. During the February 20-23 trip, we met in Sevastopol with Mayor Serhiy Kunitsyn; Institute for Geopolitical and Euro-Atlantic Integration Studies Director Serhiy Kulyk; Euro-Atlantic Choice director Ivan Shulga; Ukrainian Culture and Information Center director Oleksandr Korotun; Timofei Nikityuk of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), and others. In Simferopol, we met with Oleksandr Shevchuk, director of the Simferopol affiliate of the National Institute for Strategic Research, and his colleagues. We spoke with Volodymyr Protsenko of pro-Ukrainian language organization Prosvita in Kyiv just before the trip.

Luzhkov Plants a Flag

[1](#)3. (U) As we left our hotel February 21, we encountered the rather jarring sight of a group of mostly pensioners holding up Russian flags and a banner proclaiming "Russian

Sevastopol." They and a Russian Navy honor guard were assembled before Sevastopol's World War II memorial, awaiting Moscow Mayor Luzhkov's arrival to lay a wreath. Luzhkov made a one-day visit to Sevastopol to open "Moscow House," the Russian Culture and Information Center funded by Moscow city in Sevastopol. While in Sevastopol, Luzhkov also visited the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Moskva missile cruiser, the Crimean branch of Moscow State University, and the dedication of a Moscow city-financed housing complex for Russian Black Sea Fleet sailors and their families. According to further media accounts, the Crimean Autonomous Republic's parliament adjourned so its leaders could meet Luzhkov on his arrival in Simferopol and signed a "treaty" with him to transfer part of Lenin District -- 23,000 hectares of salt marsh along the Sea of Azov bordering Russia -- to the Moscow city administration's control.

¶4. (U) Luzhkov made comments while in Sevastopol that ignited controversy. Referring to Sevastopol as the "city of Russian glory," he lamented that Sevastopol and Crimea had been torn away from Russia in a process that left "deep wounds" in Russian hearts "that are still bleeding." Luzhkov also said, while shaking hands with the crowd, "We will not give Sevastopol away." The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry reacted to Luzhkov's "challenge" of the Crimean Peninsula's "status as belonging to Ukraine" by charging that Luzhkov had carried out "a planned action" aimed at undermining positive shifts in Ukraine-Russia relations. The Ukrainian MFA hoped the Russian authorities would react appropriately and warned that Ukraine reserved the right to take "appropriate measures." Acting Security Services of Ukraine (SBU) chief Valentyn Nalyvaichenko told the media that Ukraine would react sternly with measures ranging from a verbal warning and entry ban to "more serious administrative or criminal penalties."

KYIV 00000702 002 OF 004

Luzhkov's office then fired back with its own statement that the Ukrainian MFA statement contained "crude fabrications" and that Luzhkov had merely expressed regret over the collapse of the Soviet Union. Luzhkov's statement also asserted that "in terms of its ethnic composition," Crimea remained "Russian territory."

¶5. (U) The media reported on other events in Crimea that indicated at least some peninsula residents shared Luzhkov's sentiments. When receiving Luzhkov, the Russian national anthem was played before the Ukrainian one and pro-Russian demonstrators trampled on Ukrainian flags. After the MFA statement was issued, Crimean Communist leader and Ukrainian Parliamentary deputy Leonid Hrach derided Foreign Ministry officials for being "gigolos" for the U.S. Secretary of State. On February 19, in Simferopol, Crimean pro-Russian groups -- Eurasia Youth Union and Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia People's Front -- burned the Ukrainian constitution and placed a sign with "occupation administration" before the presidential envoy building. On February 23, about 1,000 marchers in Sevastopol demanded that the city join Russia and that Russian be made an official language in Crimea.

Embattled Ukrainian Language

¶6. (U) Away from Luzhkov's over-blown rhetoric and demonstrators' slogans, the situation on the ground in Sevastopol was calmer, although the ethnic Ukrainian situation was still somewhat murky. Prosvita's Protsenko said ethnic Ukrainians number 84,000 (22 percent) versus the 270,000 ethnic Russians (71 percent) of Sevastopol's total population of 380,000. Among ethnic Ukrainians, however, a sizable percentage, 52,000, speaks no Ukrainian, Protsenko claimed. He complained that, due to ethnic Ukrainians' distinct minority status in Sevastopol, they lack political clout, with no representation in the city council and the highest ranking official in the city administration being the deputy mayor for cultural affairs. "Orange" parties (Our Ukraine, Batkivshchina) also had no representation on the

city council.

¶17. (U) The status of the Ukrainian language suffers as a result, Protsenko continued. Protsenko could speak Ukrainian only on the Ukrainian Navy Briz television station; the management of STV and Narodny specifically prohibited him from speaking Ukrainian. Only one school on the outskirts of the city taught in Ukrainian. The school, with only about 120 students, was an orphanage boarding school, which now had only a handful of orphans, but to which parents of other students had to pay boarding fees. Three other public schools, out of 63 total, taught in a combination of Russian and Ukrainian; the remaining schools taught Ukrainian as a foreign language. Protsenko had petitioned the city council to convert one or two more schools in a downtown location to Ukrainian language instruction, but the request had been disregarded.

¶18. (U) Protsenko and other contacts, however, were agreed that Sevastopol residents were not opposed to Ukrainian language instruction, per se; everyone understood the importance of Ukrainian language proficiency for their children's futures. In fact, Sevastopol school children, who largely studied Ukrainian as a foreign language, had excelled in a nation-wide competition of Ukrainian language competency.

Ethnic Tensions

¶19. (U) Although the major ethnic group in the Crimean peninsula are Russians, about 72 percent of Crimea's 2.25 million inhabitants, with ethnic Ukrainians second largest with 22 percent, over eighty other ethnic groups reside on the peninsula, including Tatars, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, and Georgians. Sevastopol reflects this ethnic diversity. A Bulgarian representative of the Association of Cultural and Ethnic Societies of Sevastopol, consisting of 36 groups, said the Bulgarian group was the most active in the association and that Bulgarians had lived for 200 years in Sevastopol.

¶10. (U) Ukrainian Culture and Information Center (UCIC) director Korotun said, after the collapse of the fishing industry, UCIC had taken over a house of culture for sailors during the Soviet period. Korotun contrasted attitudes of a decade ago, when UCIC was founded, to the current broad acceptance of the Ukrainian language and culture today. Those who argued differently were simply trying to make a political issue of the Ukrainian language's official status. When UCIC was first established, only a handful of the 150

KYIV 00000702 003 OF 004

UCIC employees could speak Ukrainian; now virtually all did. UCIC sponsored 600 events annually in Sevastopol to raise awareness of Ukrainian history, culture, and traditions. Ukrainian choirs and dance groups often performed at UCIC's capacious auditorium, and large numbers of Sevastopol residents participated in commemorations of Tara Shevchenko's birthday before his monument.

¶11. (SBU) Union of Ukrainian Women representative Bohdana Protsak and others painted a different picture of the status of the ethnic Ukrainian community in Sevastopol, however. Protsak, who wears the same traditional braid favored by opposition politician Yuliya Tymoshenko, said she was often derided as a "Tymoshenko-ite" and had been assaulted twice for speaking Ukrainian in public while riding public transportation. She blamed Moscow for nurturing aggression against ethnic Ukrainians and funding the activity of extremist, pro-Russian organizations. Prosvita members who gathered in the UCIC library to speak to us aired similar complaints. A Greek Catholic priest echoed Protsak's complaint that the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, maintained an iron grip on Sevastopol. The Greek Catholic congregation had a property in central Sevastopol, but could not get city council permission to

build its church. The Kyiv Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church also did not have a church in Sevastopol. In a separate meeting, Sevastopol Human Rights Group's Olha Vilko said she had been impressed with the positive police follow-up to her complaint regarding a person whom the police had detained for speaking Ukrainian.

Life After the Russian Black Sea Fleet

¶12. (C) According to some press reports, Sevastopol Mayor Kunitsyn and city assembly chairman Valeriy Saratov, accompanying Luzhkov, were displeased by his controversial comments, but Kunitsyn had little to say regarding Sevastopol-Russian relations when we met with him just before he greeted Luzhkov. Noting that he had filled the position of Sevastopol mayor for just eight months, Kunitsyn said the Russian Black Sea Fleet presence in Sevastopol was a national-level issue regarding which he would offer no views.

Kunitsyn noted that, in July of 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers had approved a 10-year Sevastopol development program, "Program for Sustainable Socio-Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Development of Sevastopol." (The 10-year plan, rather than emphasizing private investment, envisions national and local government expenditures on city infrastructure and state-owned enterprises. Kunitsyn told us the plan would cost U.S. \$1.2 billion, with half provided from the national budget.) When we pressed him for specific plans to prepare for departure of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) in 2017, the date the current Russian-Ukrainian agreement on the BSF expires, Kunitsyn spoke vaguely about tourism development and promotion of port and maritime cargo services.

¶13. (U) In reality, Sevastopol needs to plan seriously for Russian BSF departure if it is to minimize the negative economic repercussions. According to an article in "Black Sea Security," authored by Kulyk and his colleague, Dmytro Shtybluk, 23,000 Sevastopol residents (12.7 percent of the employed population) work at Russian BSF enterprises and organizations, with an additional 2,000-3,000 at BSF facilities in other Crimean cities. Russian BSF payments in 2005 to Ukraine amounted to U.S. \$98 million, with the Russian BSF also supporting financially the Sevastopol city budget. In November 2005, Russian BSF staff agreed with Sevastopol administration on joint construction and renovation of city infrastructure, with the Russian BSF providing U.S. \$7.2 million in 2005-2006.

¶14. (U) The article notes, altogether, the Russian BSF directly contributes 20-25 percent of Sevastopol's budget. (Kunitsyn, however, said it was declining year-by-year and was now 18 percent.) In addition, the Russian BSF's contribution to Sevastopol's economy includes purchases of food and other supplies from local businesses (8.5 tons of food for \$8.4 million in 2004) and, from 1992-2004, renovation of 44 houses (for U.S. \$23.8 million) and construction of a secondary school (U.S. \$2.46 million). Private expenditures of Russian BSF personnel stationed in Crimea also benefit the economy.

Here to Stay?

¶15. (C) Although Kunitsyn and the city administration should be planning seriously now for the Russian BSF's departure,

KYIV 00000702 004 OF 004

the fact is that neither he nor other Sevastopol residents seriously believe that the Russian BSF will leave in 2017. (CVU's Nikityuk and others also accused Kunitsyn of being an extremely corrupt individual, concerned only with his personal enrichment and advancement.) Pro-NATO activist Kulyk argued that the Russian BSF simply did not have the time to relocate or construct from scratch the necessary infrastructure to house the Russian BSF elsewhere by 2017, if

it began immediately. In Georgia, for example, the Russian military had taken more than a year to withdraw just soldiers and tanks. Russia also needed the Russian BSF presence to maintain its political dominance over Ukraine because it saw Ukraine as part of a greater Slavic homeland. Kulyk opined that Russia would agree to begin the withdrawal in 2017 with the relocation of non-essential elements, but it would never agree to relocate the Russian BSF's core units and ships.

¶16. (C) Kulyk said Russia works actively to foster Sevastopol residents' sense of allegiance to Russia and feelings of economic dependence on the Russian BSF. Twenty Russian institutes of higher education had branches in Sevastopol (including a campus of Russia's elite Moscow State University, MGU) and the Russian MoD funds the operation of Sevastopol public school No. 8 for the children of its navy. CVU's Nikityuk said Russia provides funding to pro-Russian organizations such as Russia Bloc, which use the funding to provide social welfare support to needy residents such as obtaining low-cost or free medical supplies and treatment. Euro-Atlantic Choice Director Shulga agreed that Moscow would never permit the Russian BSF's withdrawal from Crimea and said Russia hoped Sevastopol's residents would turn out onto the streets to protest and prevent any departure.

¶17. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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